Proofreading Tips

Matthew Stibbe Articulate Marketing

12 May 2021

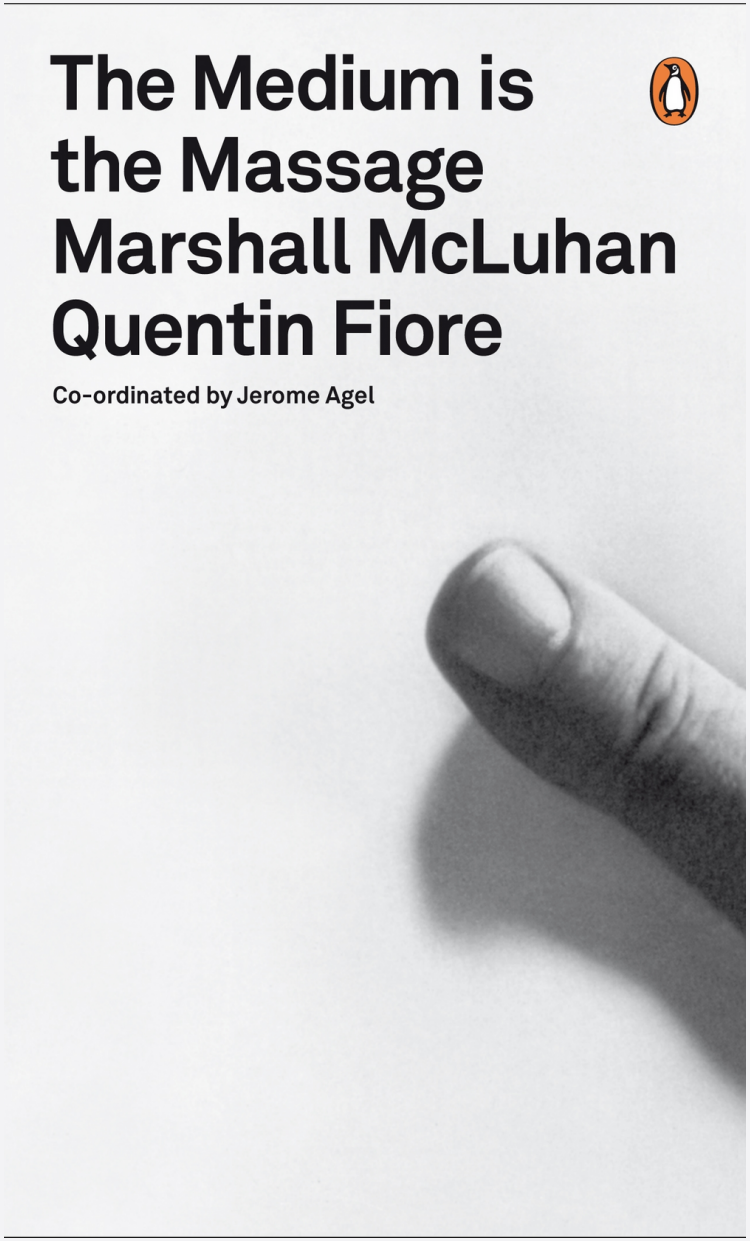




The psychology bit

Why do people make mistakes when writing?

- Bad typing (average accuracy for a typist is around 92%)
- Transposition errors (hte not the)
- Word substitution
- Technology errors, (e.g. autocorrect and auto-transcription)
- Inconsistently applying guidelines (e.g. bullet list punctuation)
- Mistakes caused by poor editing or track changes
- Not applying spelling or grammar rules correctly
- Changing direction mid-sentence, without catching up



Most commonly misspelled words

1. Separate - 92,100
2. Questionnaire - 46,000
3. Potato - 38,000
4. Diarrhoea - 20,10
5. Definitely - 18,800
6. Embarrass - 15,000
7. Conscience - 14,600
8. Unnecessary - 12,000
9. Bureaucracy - 5,750
0. Manoeuvre - 1,900

(Analysis of Google searches, source The Sun!)

Shitty first draft

- Don't let perfectionism stop you writing
- Good writing is 1/2 research, 1/6 writing the words and 1/3 editing
- Writing, editing and proofreading are different things.

"The first draft of anything is shit."

Ernest Hemingway



Rules of proofreading

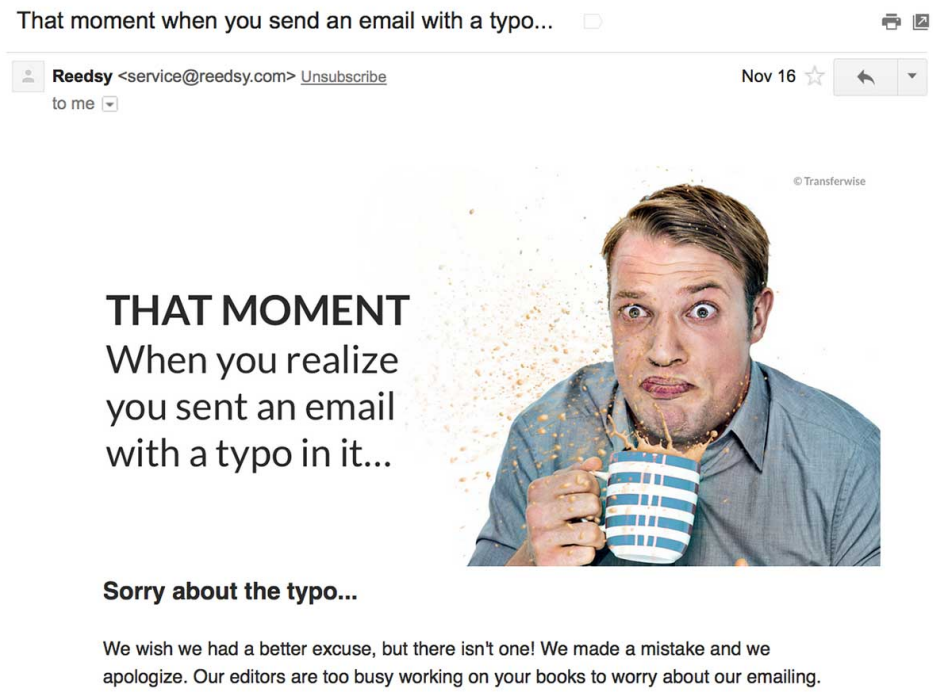
The shorter the copy, the more important proofreading becomes



Marketing emails need more proofreading

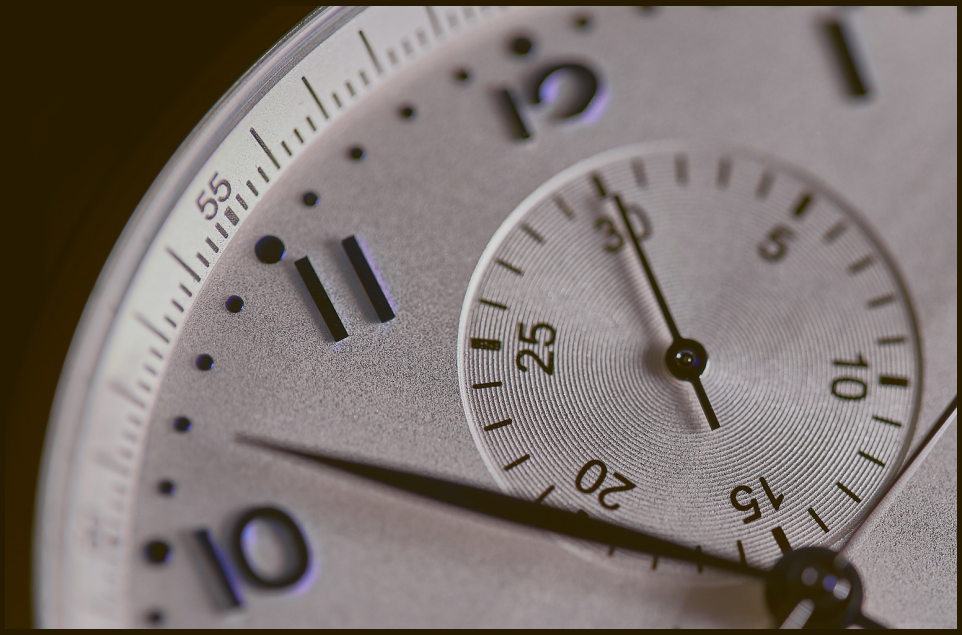
You can't recall them once you've sent them

Hat tip: GetResponse



Time is the cure for word blindness

Go do something else
Wait a day if you can



Have a checklist

British vs. US English
Special words or trademarks
Acceptable degree of informality
Tone of voice
List of clichés to avoid
List of your own writing tics to avoid





Process

Proofreading flowchart

Write fast, edit slow

- Wait
- First reading for flow
- Wait
- Second read for priority areas
- Wait
- Third read for detail

"Write drunk;
Edit Sober"
-Ernest Hemingway



Extra attention

Titles

Headlines

Subheadlines

Standfirst

Lede

Kicker

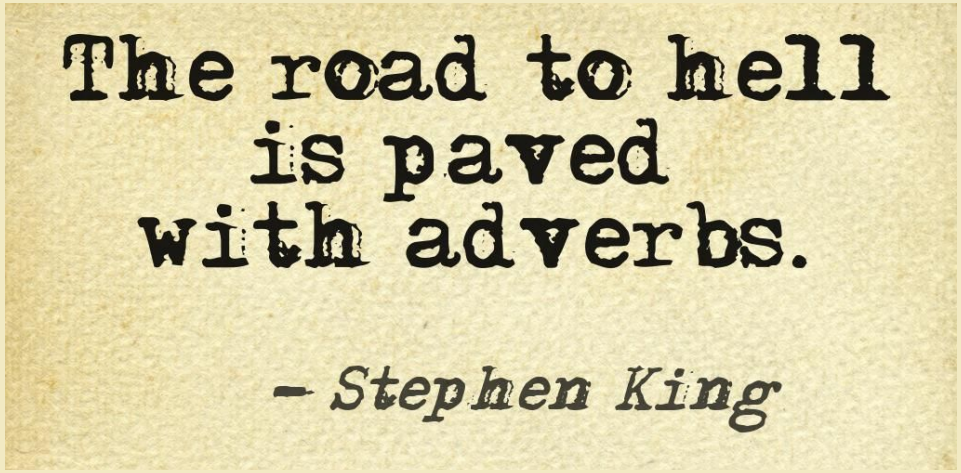


Eliminate the passive voice

Apply the 'by zombies' test



Kill all the adverbs



Companies are singular

How many Articulates are there? One!

Articulate is a great company
Articulate hires a new CFO

But the voice of a company is plural

We are a great company to work for
We hired a new CFO

Check for acronyms

If it's common, don't spell it out
If used once, just spell it out
Avoid obscure acronyms



Check for incorrect capitalisation

Here comes a product name or a technology word, let's capitalise it.

NO!



Check apostrophes

Its, it's

You're, your

There, they're, their

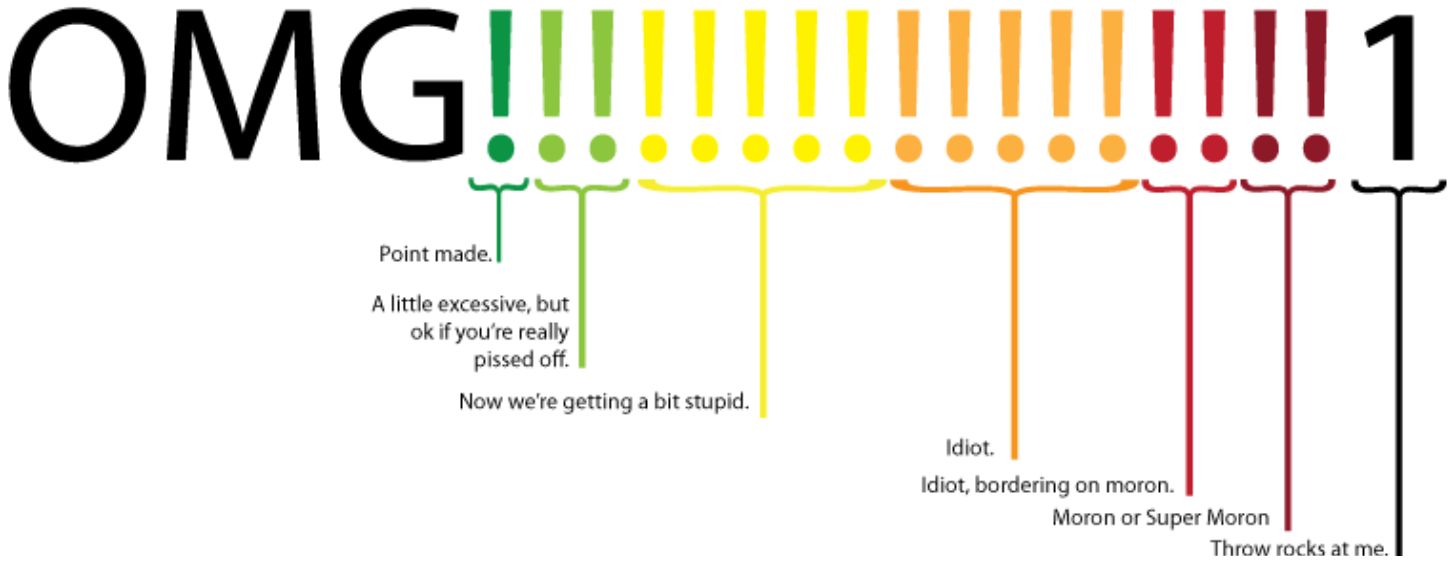
Eliminate unnecessary punctuation

Replace & with and

Avoid exclamation marks

Be wary about emojis

Be a punctuation minimalist



When writing for the screen

Write for scannability

- Split up paragraphs
- Turn lists into bullet lists
- Add more subheadings

Cut clichés

Solution
End-to-end
Low-hanging fruit
etc.

B	I	N	G	O
Take it to the next level	Teamwork	Brings value to the table	Going forward	A leading provider of...
The bottom line	Bring our "A" game	Best in Breed	Benchmark	Hit the ground running
Cast a wider net	Maximize leverage	Free!	Industry standard	Maximize customer satisfaction
At the end of the day	Giving 110%	User-experience	Win-Win situation	Push the envelope
Robust	Best practices	Core competency	Thinking outside the box	Client-centered

Check consistency

- First person vs third person
- Bullets (with or without full stops etc.)
- Single quotes or double quotes
- Numbers (one to nine in words, 10 onwards)
- Percent, per cent or %

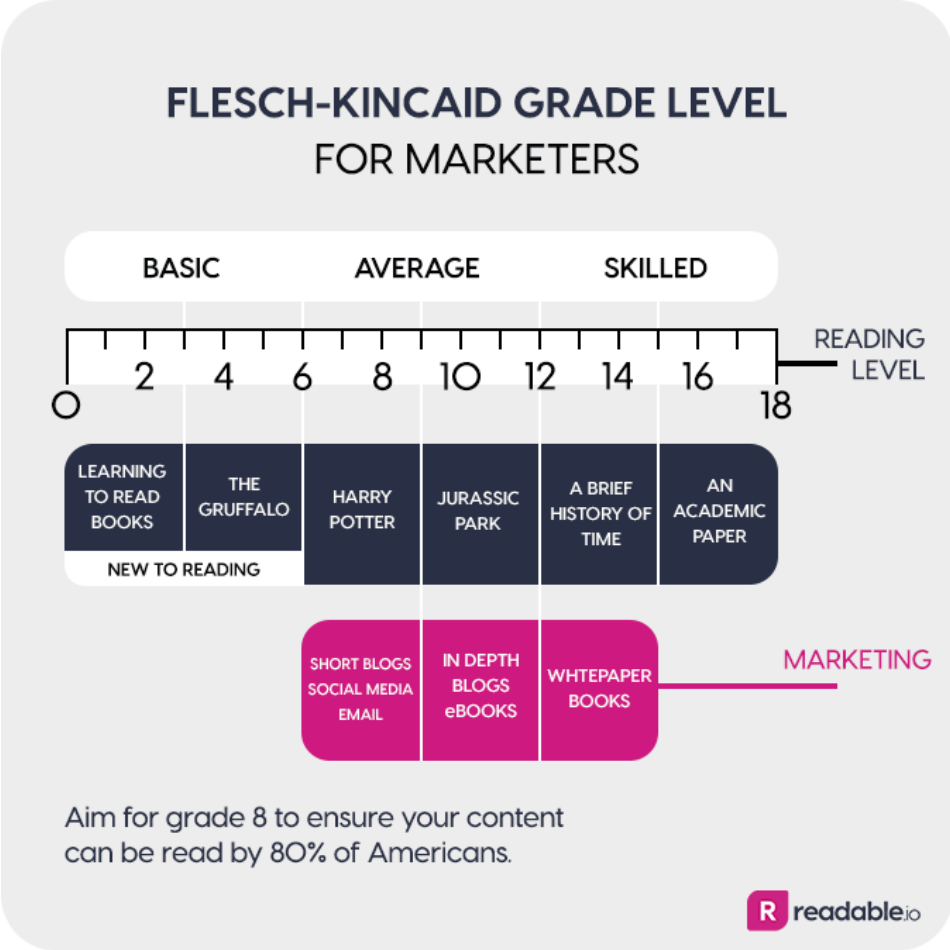


Proofreading tools

Readability tools

Flesch-Kincaid
Gunning-Fog
SMOG
And many others

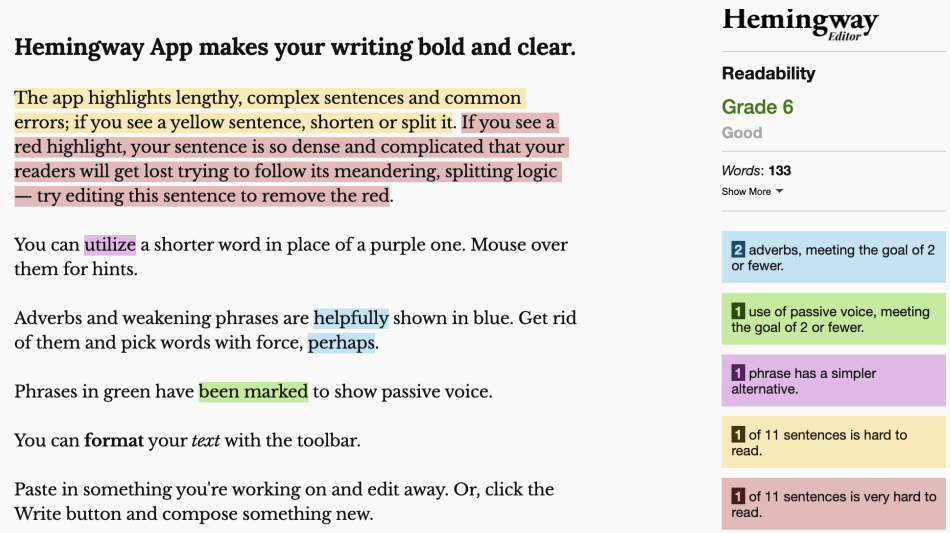
Doesn't understand the text. Typically looking at word and paragraph length and benchmarking against reference texts.



Hemingway

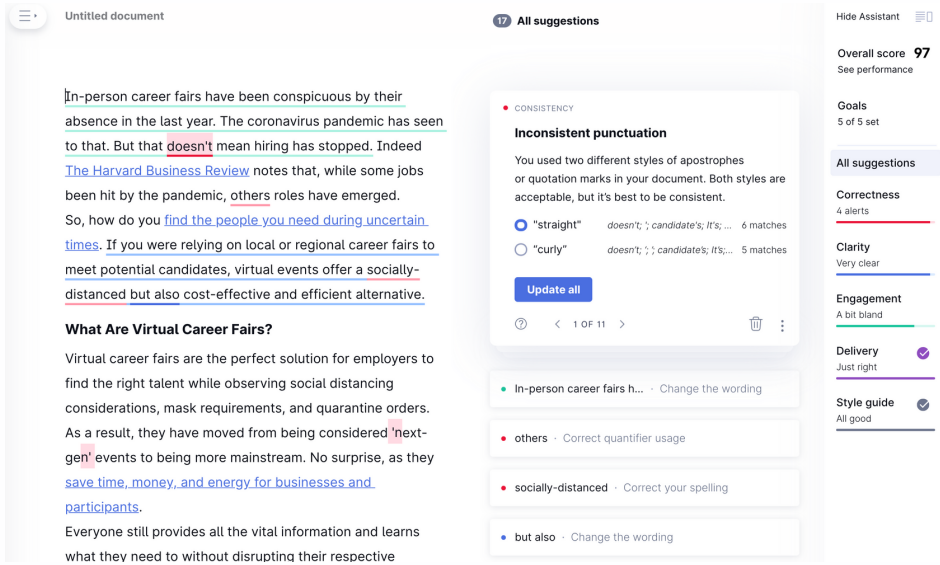
- Excellent for detecting adverbs and passive voice
- Very good for highlighting complex text
- Instant readability feedback

See: hemingwayapp.com



Grammarly

- Good at spotting typos and grammar problems
- Helpful with consistency, e.g. punctuation, US or British English etc.
- Moderately helpful at giving feedback on tone and style
- Can be annoyingly intrusive or helpfully omnipresent, depending on what you're doing
- Big risk of blindly accepting suggestions without understanding them.

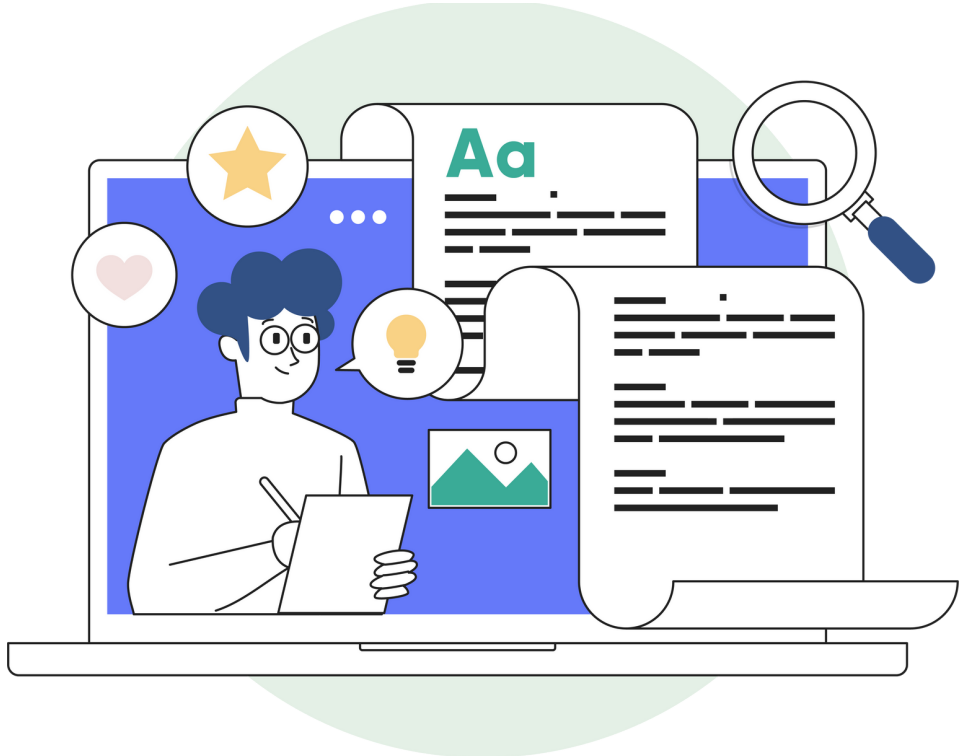




Top tips

Change things up

- Try starting at the end. And working backwards, sentence by sentence.
- Change the format - print it out, make the text bigger
- Read it out loud (or get a screen reader to do it for you)



Ask someone else

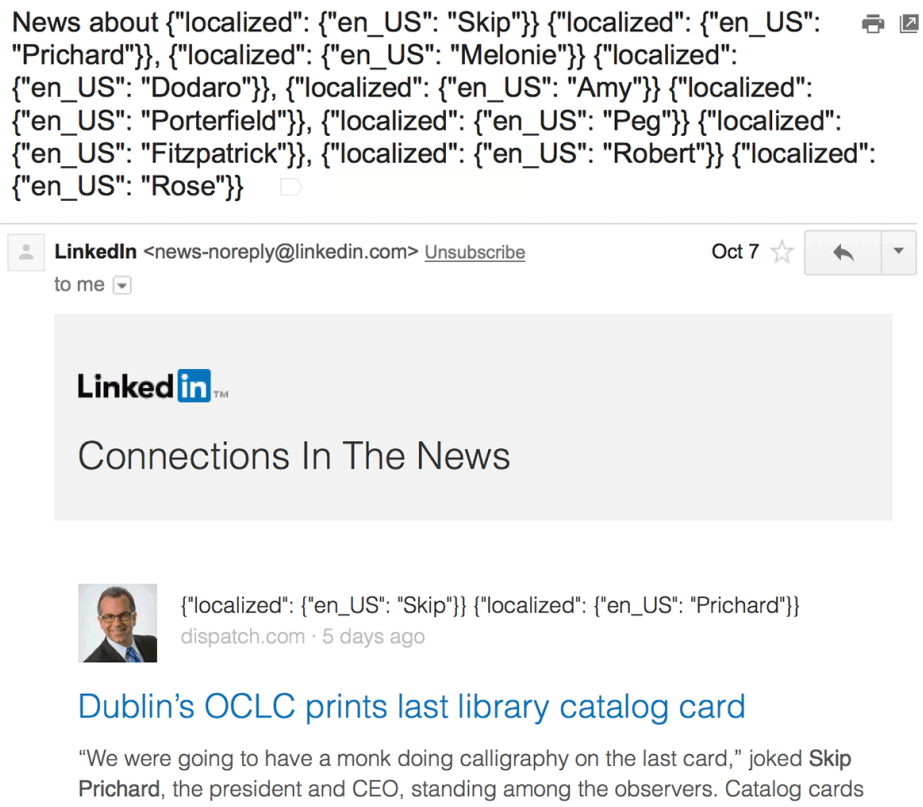
Pair editing at Articulate



TK

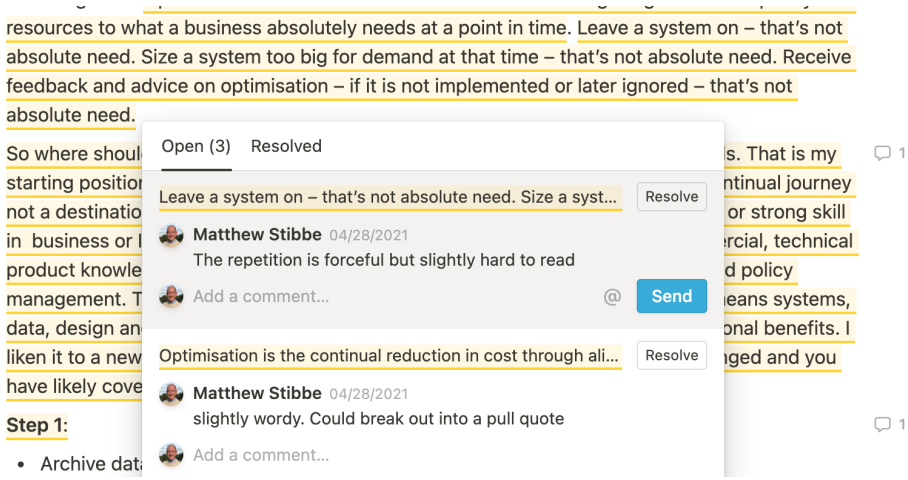
Everything is the text

- Meta description
- Social media BOM
- Page title
- Email subject line and summary



Giving good feedback

- Comments are better than changes
- Encourage better writing, not dependency on a proofreader



Beware last-minute changes

- Maintenance-induced failure
- Especially after multiple rounds of revision, multiple contributors and track changes
- One final review before it goes out, like the chef at the pass in a good restaurant



And finally...



Download our Essential Business Grammar guide

https://www.articulatemarketing.com/the-essential-business-grammar-guide





Let's talk

Video and slides appearing soon on articulatemarketing.com
Email me with questions at matthew@articulatemarketing.com
Book a call with me: www.articulatemarketing.com/meet